

Agni Ayurveda



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The role of fire is well known in traditional systems of medicine, which use the great elements of nature for healing purposes. However, one system in particular is built around a profound understanding of our biological fires. This is 'Ayurveda', the traditional natural healing system of India, the healing branch of Yoga and Vedic science going back thousands of years to ancient Vedic Rishis. Ayurveda means the wisdom (Veda) of life and longevity (Ayur).

Ayurveda is rooted upon a profound understanding of fire or Agni as a biological, psychological and cosmological principle extending to the highest Self-awareness behind all existence, Chid-Agni, the fire of consciousness.

Ayurveda and Agni, the Sacred Fire of Healing

In the Rigveda, the most ancient Vedic text, life or Ayur is defined as Agni or fire, which is our soul or life-essence. Ayurveda, therefore, is not only a ‘fire medicine’ but a ‘medicine of the soul’. Its definition of well-being is harmony with our inner soul and the soul of the universe, not just absence of physical disease.

If we remember that our lives are a sacred fire, this recognition itself creates a power of awareness that keeps us in harmony with the entire universe. As the soul is the consciousness principle within us, Ayurveda is also a ‘medicine of consciousness’ stating that only what we do with awareness really heals us. All true healing works through the

giving of care, love and consciousness. This means that consciousness is the ultimate healing force, the real healing fire.

Ayurveda recognizes fire or Agni on a physical level as the key to all bodily processes from cellular metabolism to perception in the brain, which all involve the burning of energy and the generation of light. It regards the digestive fire or ‘fire in the belly’, called Jatharagni, as the basis of physical health. If the digestive fire is kept burning in a consistent and clean manner, then health is guaranteed; our food is digested properly, our tissues and waste-materials form normally, and there is the necessary internal energy to ward off any pathogens that may attack us from the outside.

Along with the digestive fire, Ayurveda recognizes the ‘life-fire’ or fire of Prana

(Pranagni) as the key to healing on an energetic level. If our breath is deep and full, calm and consistent, then our vital force will maintain harmony and balance between all our bodily systems and mental faculties. Our life-fire is a force of nature that can bring us all the healing energies of the universe. It holds the natural intelligence of healing that is responsible for the wonderful intricacy and marvelous order of our organism and its amazing ability to repair itself from injury and disease. Unless we learn to harness our own fire of healing, how can anything else really help us?

In my own work as an Ayurvedic healer, I always emphasize the role of Agni as the most important factor in health. Putting patients in touch with their different Agnis, showing them how to understand and regulate their internal fires of digestion, breath and mind makes Ayurveda and

natural healing very simple and easy to apply. I call this 'Agni-Ayurveda', fire Ayurveda or 'fire-medicine', which was probably the original Vedic form of Ayurveda.

We can easily assess the state of our digestive fire through the conditions of our appetite, digestion and elimination. We can diagnose our life-fire by how we breathe, by our level of strength, energy and endurance. We can determine the state of the mental fire through noting our acuity of perception, power of reasoning and ability to deal with emotional challenges. You can check your own signs in this regard:

If your appetite is regular but not excessive, your digestion smooth and elimination regular and, above all, if you have a pleasant breath and no tongue coating, then your

digestive fire is functioning at an optimal level.

If your breath is full and deep, without coughing or gasping, if you have good circulation, good strength in your extremities and good resistance to disease, then your life-fire is functioning at an optimal level.

If your senses have good acuity, your reasoning powers are sharp and you are content and at peace with yourself, not running after external enjoyment, then your mental fire is functioning at an optimal level.

Noting the condition of these three main biological fires, we can regulate them through diet, herbs, exercise and meditation so that we can manifest the full potential of our lives.

Ayurveda as it is usually applied works to balance the three doshas or biological humors of Vata (that which blows), Pitta (that which cooks) and Kapha (that which sticks). These represent the vital energies of the three elements of air (Vata), fire (Pitta) and water (Kapha) as they both create the physical body and put their distinctive mark on our individual constitution, creating Vata (airy), Pitta (fiery) and Kapha (watery) types of people. Patients follow recommendations of diet and life-style or more specific disease treatments to counter any excess or toxic conditions of the doshas within them.

Agni is the main factor behind all three doshas.

VATA or the biological air-humor is the pranic or bioelectrical force that comes forth from Agni.

PITTA or the biological fire-humor is the vital substance, the flammable oil that holds Agni in the body.

KAPHA or the biological water-humor makes up the bulk of our bodily tissues and serves as a container and support for this internal fire.

The three doshas are rooted in Agni and can be treated through it. Vata people need to cultivate a more consistent internal fire to keep Vata, whose energy tends to be erratic, in balance. Pitta people need to keep their fire from getting too high, as it naturally tends to be excessive in their fiery temperaments. Kapha people require a higher internal fire to burn up the excess weight and water that they tend to accumulate along with the inertia of their lives.

As we are fire beings possessing a fire body, the regulation of our internal fires is the determinative factor for our happiness and well-being. By learning how to balance our internal fires or Agnis on physical, pranic and psychological levels, we can connect to the deepest level of Agni, the soul in the heart, the flame that sustains all of our biological fires. This not only facilitates health but also opens the wellsprings of creativity and aids in rejuvenation.

Fire and Disease

As fire creatures, most of our diseases are born out of cold that prevents our inner fires from burning fully. Cold reduces our digestive power, weakens our vitality, inhibits our movement, impairs our circulation and causes pain. An increase of cold can be caused by exposure to the

elements, by wrong diet, by overwork, by the aging process and by other factors that wear down our fire.

However, diseases can arise from excess fire as well, such as conditions of heat, inflammation and bleeding in which we have overly elevated or improperly burning internal fires. There are also unhealthy fires born of poorly digested food or the accumulation of toxins which produce the ‘smoke’ or ‘ash’ of disease. In such conditions our fires need to be purified, regulated and restored to their proper function.

The negative ‘fire of disease’ fights with the positive ‘fire of health’ in the body. We must learn to increase the fire of health and decrease the toxic fire that is seeking to replace it. It is easy to see the difference between these two fires. The fire of health

gives clarity to the mind, luster to the skin, good circulation and good digestion; the fire of disease results in emotional agitation, poor complexion, poor circulation and poor digestion.

To counter imbalance, whether due to cold or to toxic fire, we must promote the fire of healing. Our inner fires have a healing potential, a ‘fire of healing’ that can overcome all diseases. This arises through the natural effort of our internal fires to protect our organism and restore its internal balance.

Fire both within and around us provides many tools for healing. In various forms as heat, light, energy and color, it is the main force for healing both the body and mind. Fire, we could say, is our main natural healer. It is not our therapies or our medicines that really bring about healing.

These are at best vehicles for the healing fire. The therapist is also not the source of healing, but functions mainly as a form of fire or a fire priest, providing warmth, guidance and comfort.

A true doctor should be able to access the wisdom of fire to help balance our bodily fires. He or she must both know the laws of fire as well as how to work with the healing tools of fire. Above all, they must be able to take the role of the sacred fire in treating others. The true healer must become Agni as both an organic and spiritual force.

To do this we must honor the sacred fire in nature, such as many traditional people do with their fire rituals, notably the yajnas and havans or Vedic fire offerings, which should be an integral part of our lives. We should also learn to offer our thoughts and emotions into the Divine fire, the universal Agni that

dwells at the core of our being, the spiritual heart. Linking to the universal fire we can bring the Divine light of enlightenment and Self-realization into ourselves and into the entire world. This is the great challenge of our information technology era, in which we have lost the organic roots of life and are caught up in electrical stimulation.

Remember to cultivate Brahmagni, the sacred fire of the eternal and infinite Brahman, and we can bring peace and harmony for all. This is the essence of Agni Ayurveda and Agni Yoga.